



Getting the Right Start on the Road to Citizenship; Americanization's First Opportunity Is at Ellis Island



By Fred B. Pitney

FREDERICK A. WALLIS, the new Immigration Commissioner for the Port of New York, stood in the upper cabin of the General Putnam, surrounded by immigrants. The General Putnam was taking 800 newly arrived immigrants from Ellis Island for distribution among the railroads along the Jersey shore to continue their voyages to the interior of America.

"Any one here speak English?" asked Mr. Wallis.

A young Jew, with his features hidden behind a curtain of pimple, came forward.

"Yes," he said, or something that was enough like yes to be understood as an affirmative.

"Where are you from?" asked the commissioner.

"Poland," said the voice behind the veil.

A Thousand a Week

"That's interesting," said the commissioner. "A man from the Hebrew Aid Society told me yesterday they had booked up the Jews in Poland to come at the rate of 1,000 a week for the next fifty-two weeks. We'll ask this fellow."

"Many Poles want to come over here?" he asked the Jew.

"All Poland would come, if they could get the money," the Jew replied. "Is it true that every one in America is rich?"

"That will do for you," said the commissioner. "You'll find out in a few days."

He raised his voice again. "Any one else here speak English?" he called. "I am looking for some one who came over on the Leopoldina."

Another Jew came forward.

"Me on Leopoldina," he said.

Now, it happened that the Leopoldina arrived on Wednesday with 1,200 immigrants, who had paid approximately \$110 each for their third-class passage across the ocean.

it was not until after they reached Ellis Island that they had any breakfast.

"When did you eat last on the Leopoldina?" Commissioner Wallis asked the Jew.

"Wednesday supper," the immigrant replied.

"Didn't you have any breakfast Thursday morning?"

"No. No breakfast."

Even Children Unfed

There was a little group around the Jew.

"How many in your party?" asked the commissioner.

"Five. Me, my wife, two children, baby."

"What did the baby do?"

"They wouldn't give us anything

treat these immigrants right. There is one way to make them do it. I'll refuse to receive immigrants at El-



YOU can tell at a glance that this sturdy couple has come to America with the idea of working hard and making good

for the baby. I had to buy little milk extra for the baby."

"Nobody had any breakfast?"

"No. Nobody. I had to buy milk for baby."

No Breakfast For 600

There was a little Irish girl on the General Putnam. She had been married four months ago in Dublin to a Spaniard and they were going to Detroit, where her husband had a job as a cook. She spoke up:

"They took off all the unmarried ones from the Leopoldina, 600 of them, Wednesday night," she said.

"But we married ones and the children, 600 more of us, had to stay until Thursday morning, and they didn't give us any breakfast on the ship Thursday morning, not even milk for the babies."

"I'll see about this," said Commissioner Wallis. "I'm going to stop this sort of thing or break a leg. These steamship companies have got to understand that aliens coming to America are human beings, whether they come third class or first class, and they've got to be treated like human beings. I don't care if I make an enemy of every steamship company sailing into the Port of New York, they are going to

Perhaps you haven't noticed the unusual thing about this story. It is a Commissioner of Immigration seeing for himself how the immigrants are treated.

Commissioner Wallis left his house at 5 o'clock that morning to go down the Bay and meet the Olympic at Quarantine. A young Englishman had come to see him a couple of days before.

"I am an actor," said the Englishman, "and I came over here and got a job. Now I've got to go out on the road with the company tomorrow, and my wife and baby are on the way over here on the Olympic. They are coming third class,



THE first meal in America. Immigrants around a table and dining room at Ellis Island

THEIR first glimpse of the fair land of promise. Who knows what they see there?

The rates are so high I couldn't bring them first class. What am I going to do? I can't have them going to Ellis Island, and I've got to go away myself to-morrow. I've got their hotel picked out and their rooms reserved, but I can't be here to meet them so they won't have to go to Ellis Island and be held up over there."

"That's all right," the Commissioner replied. "You go ahead with your company. I'll look after your wife and baby."

So the Immigration Commissioner got up at 4:30 and left his house at 5 o'clock, went down the Bay and met the Olympic at Quarantine and had a couple of stewards look up the young English actor's wife and baby in the steerage and bring them up to the second class cabin, where the Immigration Commissioner examined their papers, and at the dock he had the stewards get their baggage out and put them in a taxi and send them to their hotel.

But let's get back to the General Putnam.

A Greek Comes Back

There was a Greek on board who acted as interpreter to help Commissioner Wallis question some of the Italians. After a while the Commissioner asked the Greek some questions.

"You've been here before?" he said.

"Oh, yes," said the Greek. "I was here eleven years."

"Like it?" asked Mr. Wallis.

"You bet," the Greek replied.

"When did you go back?"

"Last November, I went home to

visit my folks. Now I come back."

"Do pretty well over here? Make money?"

The Greek grinned.

"When I came here first I had \$300. I've been in business in



MR. FREDERICK A. WALLIS, new Immigration Commissioner for the Port of New York, who believes that the first step in Americanization should be humane treatment for the new arrival

my heart and my brain I figure I'm worth \$100,000 at lowest."

Bound for the West

At this juncture the General Putnam pulled up alongside the Erie Railroad dock and about two hundred immigrants were landed. The Commissioner followed them off the boat. They were herded along a narrow board walk, built over the water, to a long shed piled high with freight, chiefly sugar for export. No wonder sugar is 34 cents a pound!

In the shed the immigrants were divided into two groups. One group was going to Cleveland and Youngstown and would leave at 8:45 that evening. The other group was going to Chicago and points west and would leave at 1:25 the next morning. It was 6 o'clock then. There was a Scotch woman with four children, three girls and a boy, in the long distance group. Commissioner Wallis went over to talk to her.

"We are going to Des Moines," she said. "My husband and I came over first and got ourselves established and then I went back for the children. I asked for my tickets over the New York Central, but the agent at Ellis Island gave them to me this way, by the Erie."

The Commissioner figured it up.

"If they had gone by the Central," he said, "they would be in Chicago to-morrow afternoon and in Des Moines by 10 o'clock to-morrow night." He turned to an Erie offi-

cial. "What time will they get to Chicago on the Erie?" he asked. "Saturday morning," said the official.

"And they will be in Des Moines about 3 o'clock Saturday afternoon?"

"About then," the official replied.

"Eighteen hours longer on the train for a mother with four children because the ticket agent at Ellis Island wouldn't sell them the tickets they asked for," said Commissioner Wallis. "And they pay the same for the tickets this way as they would on the Central. That fellow is going to hear from me."

One Agent for All

The Commissioner explained.

"There is one ticket agent at Ellis Island," he said. "He sells the tickets for all the roads, and they all club together to pay him. It is part of his business to see that the immigrant traffic is divided up equally among all the roads, but it is not part of his business to refuse to sell a ticket on the road asked for or to keep any immigrant cramped and crowded in a stuffy railroad coach eighteen hours longer than is necessary, and that ticket agent is going to think of the immigrants first when he sells tickets in the future, or there is going to be another man selling tickets over there."

The railroad men began to marshal the short-haul group down the length of the freight shed.

"We have to keep them waiting," it was explained, "because they have to cross the tracks to the passenger station and we wait until there are not so many trains moving, so that it won't be dangerous for them. Come this way, Commissioner."

But Commissioner Wallis hung back. "What time will the train be ready for these others?" he asked.

"The cars will be run in about 10 o'clock," he was told, "and they can go aboard then. This way is the clearest path, Commissioner."

Still Commissioner Wallis hung back.

"Lot of freight you've got in this shed," he remarked.

"Yes," said the railroad man. "It's pretty crowded in the center. You'd better follow this aisle over here by the wall."

"How long do you keep freight in here?" asked the Commissioner.

"We move it out as fast as we can," said the railroad official. "And then a light broke over him. 'Get that other group moving,' he said to one of his assistants. 'We can't keep them standing here until 10 o'clock.'"

Commissioner Wallis followed the immigrants out of the shed. By the time the Commissioner's party had crossed the tracks and reached the passenger station the two groups of immigrants were collected at opposite ends of the outdoor shed. They had put their baggage down on the concrete floor and were standing around, the mothers holding the babies in their arms. A man with a cap that said "Head Usher" came up to the Commissioner's party.

Just Let Them Wait

"Are you going to keep these people here until their train is ready?" asked Commissioner Wallis.

"Sure," said the head usher, "They're all right here."

"What are the toilet arrangements for the women?" asked Mr. Wallis.

One of the other railroad officials hastened to explain.

"There is a toilet inside the station," he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Wallis, "and you have got these people under guard out here so that they can't reach it. Aren't there any seats inside the station?"

"We can't have"—the head usher began. But one of the other

(Continued on page 2)



A TYPICAL immigrant of the peasant woman class

It used to be possible, before the war, to cross first class on a better boat than the Leopoldina for less money than those immigrants paid to come third class. But, on top of all that, Commissioner Wallis had been told by an immigrant on the lower deck of the General Putnam that the third-class passengers had been routed out at 5 o'clock Thursday morning and kept standing around without any breakfast until 6 o'clock, when the barge came to take them to Ellis Island, and that